

Autonomust-feelings: Why Emotions Are Driving Autonomous Vehicle Brand Perception

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Contrary to what many may think, humans are less rational than we believe ourselves to be. Sure, some people have a natural propensity towards factual, rational analysis and are highly skilled when it comes to weighing up evidence and distinguishing fact from emotion. But even the most scientifically minded individual is still susceptible to cognitive biases based on emotion. Indeed, many of these weaknesses of the human mind, which are based on emotion, are what have helped us to navigate threats throughout the history of our species – the fact that you are sitting here today is testament to that fact!

For the vast majority of people, cars are an established part of life. They have been a constant presence since birth and are viewed as a safe means to get from A to B. Save for a statistically small incidence of road accidents, each successful journey we make reinforces our confidence in the safety of cars. To drive a car, new drivers must go through a structured process of learning and testing that equips them with the basic skills to operate a vehicle on a public highway. Through repetition, we continually reinforce our road awareness and ability to perceive hazards.

There is a tacit understanding that all other drivers possess at least a reasonable level of skill, giving us a form of automotive social contract. When everybody drives in a way that is safe and responsible, the whole system works. People buy into it. Until, that is, autonomous vehicles completely re-write the rules of engagement.

A New Phase of Automotive History

In this new phase of automotive history, the perception of control that drivers and passengers once felt has been taken away from them, replaced by technology. The importance of this cannot be overstated. As humans, we like to feel like we're in control. An absence of control correlates with feelings of anxiousness and distress, making us more likely to avoid any kind of experience that is consistent with these emotional patterns. For autonomous vehicles to be truly successful, they must give people the confidence to cede control.

Think of it this way: you would be more comfortable allowing your experienced driver friend to give you a ride than say, your son or daughter who has just passed their driving test. Although the latter may theoretically be qualified to drive, they still display the nervousness of an inexperienced driver. There is always a risk attached, and so we're always naturally inclined to go for the safer bet. This assessment is invariably based on emotion and knowing how to leverage this will have a profound impact on the future success of OEMs.

OEMs have, until now, operated in the world of the rational. Cogs, nuts, bolts, valves – all configured in such a way to take engine performance to new heights in terms of power, torque, and fuel-efficiency. The skill of the engineers involved in the development of combustion engines has been the defining factor in the success of automakers. In the age of vehicle autonomy, a new skillset is required, one that will allow automakers to connect with customers on an emotional level.

But when you remove the driver, the human, how can you create that same emotion of safety and security that many have when getting into a vehicle driven by an experienced driver of 10+ years? Ensuring occupants feel safe in autonomous vehicles will be one of the key differentiating factors to OEM success in this dawn. As vehicles become more autonomous and rely heavily on advanced safety features, OEMs are increasingly prioritizing safety to mitigate potential risks and reassure consumers that they can have complete

confidence in the performance and reliability of their vehicles. By demonstrating a deep understanding of safety measures, OEMs can build a strong reputation as providers of secure and trustworthy autonomous driving solutions, safeguarding their brands in an increasingly competitive market.

Brands who truly understand the power of emotion and, specifically, the depth of human desire for safety will gain a major source of competitive advantage when we see widespread adoption of autonomous vehicles. Whereas customer purchasing decisions were once fueled by adrenaline and excitement about factors like aesthetics and speed, these were grounded in a fundamental acceptance of cars. It will take some time for autonomous vehicles to become as normalized as current and previous cars are. Until this point, expect safety to play an overriding role in purchasing decisions.

By understanding the emotional needs of their customers and delivering on those needs, companies can create a powerful brand perception that resonates with their audience and sets them apart from the competition. Ultimately, it's not about what you sell, but how you make people feel that will determine success in the autonomous vehicle marketplace.

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